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JEANNE RASMUSSEN: PHOTOGRAPHER OF APPALACHIA

Jeanne Rasmussen, long a free-lance photographer and writer, photographed and wrote on southern Appalachia. Many of her photographs concern coal mining, miners and their families, and community life in Appalachia. Rasmussen became involved with the United Mine Workers of America, and photographed Jock Yablonski, especially during his 1969 campaign for the union's presidency. Her photographs appeared both in a traveling exhibit sponsored by the Smithsonian Institution, and in such publications as Voices From the Mountains and From the Hills.

Born in Lubbock, Texas, on April 4, 1934, Rasmussen attended Baylor University, Waco, Texas, where as an English major she graduated in 1953. It was through her husband, M.D. Don Rasmussen, that she became interested in mining. Dr. Rasmussen devoted his medical practice to pulmonary illnesses, including the black lung disease which often afflicted coal miners.

After living for a year in Salt Lake City, Utah, during the early 1960s, the Rasmussens moved to Beckley, W.Va., where Dr. Rasmussen set up practice. Jeanne worked for the Raleigh Register and for WOAY-TV as a journalist. Dr. Rasmussen became acquainted with Jock Yablonski, who subsequently asked Jeanne to be the treasurer of his campaign for the presidency of the UMWA. Jeanne and Yablonski became friends, and she began campaigning with him and his entourage through West Virginia, Ohio and Kentucky. After his election defeat, Yablonski called Jeanne and told her that he was going to contest the election of Tony Boyle. That was the last time Jeanne talked to Yablonski; shortly after, he was murdered.

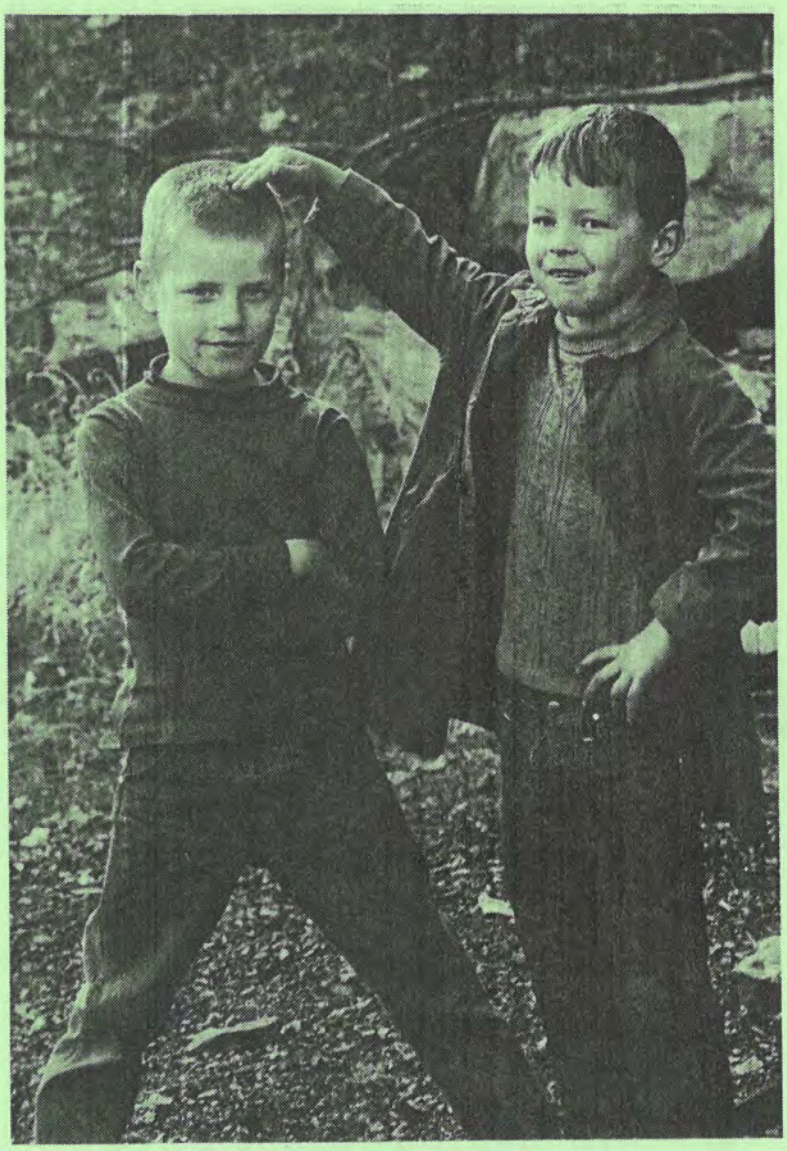

PHOTO BY JEANNE RASMUSSEN

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After Yablonski's murder, the Rasmussens were themselves the subjects of rumors which told of danger to their lives. According to Rasmussen, coal miners came to protect them and stand guard at the Rasmussens' house. Both Jeanne and Don later travelled to Erie, Pa. to testify at the Boyle murder trial. In 1974 Jeanne moved to Reston, Va., where she currently resides.

Jeanne Rasmussen donated to the archives her photographic and written materials. The photographic materials include black and white prints and negatives on Appalachian people, community life and events, coal mining camp life, and coal mining and coal miners. The written documentation includes correspondence, personal notes and scrapbooks, and published and unpublished manuscripts. The latter primarily deal with coal mining, both underground and surface. For more information on the Rasmussen collection, contact the archives at 615/929-4338.

DOWN AROUND BOWMANTOWN

Despite increased industrialization, Northeast Tennessee remains a largely rural area dominated by such traditional institutions as the church and family. Indeed, for many folks here, most vital cultural issues are still defined within the context of the home and neighborhood relations. This is particularly true for those people over fifty years of age who remember life before the Second World War. Among members of this generation, one of the most common means of social expression and communication was, and is, the music-making session. Informal get togethers at private residences, stores, schools and other locations have been well established for generations in Northeast Tennessee. Indeed, before the advent of mass media and mass entertainment , these gatherings were among the few diversions available for rural workers and their families.

The Center for Appalachian Studies and Services (CASS) at ETSU traced the social and musical networks that supported these functions by focusing on one musical community in Washington County. The project re-created, as much as possible, a portrait of this musical community. The result of the project was a documentary record album of some of the gatherings' notable participants, many of whom, in effect, documented themselves years ago by making home recordings. The album was released in January by Now and Then Records.

For several decades in Washington County every Saturday night a group of musicians gathered for informal music sessions, usually held at private residences. These sessions, which featured such excellent musicians as Gib and Jerry Broyles, Clyde Dykes, B.G. Williams and Tom Slagle, soon became community gatherings which attracted neighbors from several miles away. The music of Broyles, Dykes, Williams, Slagle and others who participated in these sessions would have been lost had it not been for the home disc recordings which the musicians made from the late 1930s through the early 1950s. These discs provide a vital historical record of several musical networks active in Washington County during this era.

The discs themselves are aluminum-core, coated with nitrous celluloid lacquer, usually, but mistakenly, called "acetate." Recordings were cut directly onto the blanks, commonly referred to as "instantaneous" records or "acetates."

Before the widespread adoption of magnetic tape technology after World War II, home disc recordings enjoyed a brief period of popularity.

Left to right: Walter Harmon, fiddle; Carroll Slemons, guitar; Tom Slagle, guitar; Bill Adams, fiddle; Will Keys, banjo; Paul Master, banjo; and Billy Joe Slemons, guitar; at Bill Adams house, Bowmantown, Tenn., fall, 1988.

Raymond Blanche, a reclusive radio repairman who lived in Limestone and Telford from the late 1940s to 1966, cut the discs recorded on side one of the album. The musical network which Blanche recorded essentially ended in the early to mid 1950s with the deaths of Gib Broyles and Clyde Dykes. The tradition of the jam sessions continues, however, in county stores and homes. In 1987, Richard Blaustein and Doug Dorschug called together banjoist Will Keys, guitarists Tom Slagle and Vestal Jackson, and fiddlers Bill Adams and Walter Harmon, to record a jam session using a portable digital setup. Examples of this distinctive style of string band music appear on side two of the album.

Here, then, is a portrait of a musical community, one still rich in the traditional social institutions which supported the music in the past. What we hear on the album is an ongoing, evolving tradition of informal music-making, a comfortable blend of past and present which is still a valued part of everyday living down around Bowmantown.

Tim Stafford
Center for Appalachian Studies and Services

[For more information on the Bowmantown project and album contact Stafford at CASS, 615/929-5348.]

OBSERVATIONS ON THE MUSIC OF THE APPALACHIAN SERPENT-HANDLING REVIVAL

When individuals first encounter the serpent-handling phenomenon of Appalachia, the two predominant features most often identified with this revival are the handling of poisonous snakes and the loud, repetitive rhythmic and melodic figures of the music. While there has been extensive academic and commercial attention given to snake-handling practices little attention has been devoted to the music of this revival; it has been described by some scholars as "improvised country rock and roll." Others have labelled it as enigmatic, a music that has no distinct characteristics.

These descriptions unfortunately lead one to believe that the music of these revivals is either completely nondescript or sounds like popular country rock. These comments may have a ring of truth to them, but there is much more that lies beneath the surface of this music. The melodic forms, harmony, instrumentation, and performance practices of the serpent-handling revival are simple, when compared to other forms of Appalachian music, but there are subtle distinctions within the entire performance event that makes the music unique. The music has discrete musicological and sociological functions within the revival, even though personal improvisation forms the basis for most of the music activities.

There are two distinctly different types of music associated with the serpent-handling revival. The first is associated with the actual snake-handling ritual and is characterized by subtle tempo variations, simple blues harmonic progressions, loud dynamic levels, and improvisation. The improvisatory nature of the music creates a fluid music presentation that seems to coincide directly with the inherent flexibility of the serpent-handling ritual. There also appears to be a direct correlation between this music and the activities of the serpent handlers that suggests that the music helps promote altered states of consciousness among the participants, but not among the performing musicians.

The second category of music often encountered during the serpent-handling revival is characterized by repetitive melodic lines, no tempo variations, simple blues harmonic progressions, moderate dynamic levels, and little or no improvisation. In addition to these characteristics most of the music is performed by one individual, often in the form of a personal testimony. This differs from the aforementioned category of music that is performed by a designated group of musicians and a variety of undesignated vocal soloists, often in a call-response format. The second type of music appears to function as a sermon, because no serpent handling occurs during this type of performance. The serpent-handling participants are often seated in the congregation.

The sociological features associated with the serpent-handling ritual are quite distinctive when viewed within a musicological context. The angular movements of the serpent-handling participants appear to correspond directly with the heavy rhythmic pulse of the electric bass. The handling of the snakes

is quite improvisatory, very much like the music that is associated with this activity. There is little or no eye contact among the serpent-handling participants, even when they converse with one another, and there is no apparent eye contact between the musicians and the participants. Yet the musicians seem to sense intuitively when the participants, as a group, are ready to stop dancing, because the music often will stop abruptly. The loud dynamic levels of the music associated with the serpent-handling ritual, along with the overt, almost expressionistic, presentation of the solo vocal line, appear to have some correlation with the activities of the participants.

The most interesting observation about the serpent-handling ritual and its music is that both phenomena appear to exhibit the same characteristics. The improvisatory nature of the music, combined with its subtle tempo variations, repetitive melodic line, and excessive dynamic levels appear to mirror many of the dance movements of the serpent handler's ritual activities. Based upon several observations there is an "undefined" semiotic relationship between the serpent-handling ritual and its music.

Scott Schwartz
Technical Services Archvist

[The archives holds a number of video tapes which document snake-handling services in Appalachia. Among these tapes are "And They Shall Take Up Serpents," "Carson Springs: A Decade Later," and "Following the Signs: A Way of Conflict." Thomas Burton, English department, and Jack Schrader, art department collaborated on the first tape, while Burton and Thomas Headley, communications department, produced the latter two videos. In addition, the archives has a number of tapes Burton recorded on serpent-handling services in West Virginia, Tennessee, Kentucky and Indiana]

MARY ELIZABETH BARNICLE: PIONEER FOLKLORIST

[The following article is a profile of Barnicle, one of the two individuals who recorded and collected the discs in the Barnicle-Cadle folk recordings recently acquired by the archives.]

Mary Elizabeth Barnicle, a native of New England, was born in Massachusetts in the late 1890s. Determined to obtain an education, Barnicle worked her way through Brown College in Vermont, and then won a scholarship to Bryn Mawr, where she studied medieval English literature, and earned a master's degree in English in the late 1920s. Upon receiving her M.A. Barnicle embarked upon a teaching career which took her to England, the University of Minnesota, Connecticut College for Women, Antioch College, New York University and the University of Tennessee at Knoxville. Barnicle became a folklorist who early saw the value of documenting culture through the use of field recordings. During the 1930s Barnicle was one the first academics to recognize the importance of the field recordings made by John and Alan Lomax in their travels through the South. The Lomaxes, among the first to document the South's black folk culture and music, made public their findings in books, radio programs and record albums.

In the early 1930s Barnicle held a teaching position at New York University. A popular, yet unconventional, teacher, Barnicle taught folklore to packed classes. Students responded very positively to Barnicle, who demanded much from her students, yet encouraged them to explore and question any topic.

Barnicle met John and Alan Lomax in New York City in the early 1930s, shortly after the two had returned from their path-breaking field trip to the South. It was on this trip that the Lomaxes first began to collect folk songs and tales

which primarily, but not exclusively, documented black culture. In New York the Lomaxes met Barnicle's roommate, Margaret Conklin, who introduced them to Barnicle. The Lomaxes and Barnicle quickly became friends, and determined in 1934 that in the near future they would go on a field trip through the South. The next summer Barnicle, Alan Lomax and black folklorist Zora Neale Hurston, whom Barnicle had met in New York City, planned a trip through the southeast to record black folk culture. The three recorded singers and storytellers in Frederica, Ga. and Hurston's all-black home town, Eatonville, Fla. The folklorists then travelled to the Bahamas, where they recorded on Andros Island and Cat Island, and in Nassau, the capital of the Bahamas. The variety of recordings they collected is impressive, and includes, for example, ring shouts, game songs, hymns, shanties and ballads. Barnicle kept a set of these recordings for her collection, while Lomax deposited another set in the Archive of American Folk song at the Library of Congress.

Mary Elizabeth Barnicle, teaching class at New York University. Photo undated.

Throughout the rest of the 1930s Barnicle continued to teach and to make field recordings. She met Tillman Cadle in New York City through a mutual friend, Jim Garland. Both Cadle and Barnicle had an interest in folksongs, and in the late 1930s Cadle arranged for Barnicle to make numerous trips to Kentucky to record local artists, including members of local church congregations and sacred harp singers. Subsequently, during the 1940s, when Cadle worked at Oak Ridge, Tenn., the two recorded Tennessee folk artists who contributed hymns, ballads and a variety of old-time fiddling styles.

During the 1930s and 1940s Barnicle also recorded in New York City. There she recorded such artists as Huddie Ludbetter (Leadbelly), Aunt Molly Jackson, Jim Garland, Sarah Ogan Gunning, and Dick Maitland, to name a few. In addition, Barnicle also recorded her students, who often contributed ethnic songs.

In 1949 Barnicle secured a position at the University of Tennessee-Knoxville. Following a year of teaching there, she retired. She and Cadle lived in their mountain home near Townsend, Tenn. until her death in December, 1979. Throughout her life Barnicle participated in many political and social causes, including women's rights, black rights, union organizing and anti-poverty activities. From all accounts she was a remarkable woman--a dedicated, enthusiastic teacher, skilled folklorist and caring human being.

[Sources for this article include the following: "'Bearing Up': Mary Elizabeth Barnicle and Folklore Recording," by Willie Smyth, Tennessee Folkore Society Bulletin, 52(Summer 1986), 34-45; "The Barnicle Recordings," by Willie Smyth, liner notes, Tennessee Folklore Society Recordings; and "A Profile: Zora Neale Hurston," by Larry Neale, Southern Exposure, 1(nos. 3&4, 1974), 160-68.]

SELECTED RECENT ACQUISITIONS

Bowmantown Project Collection, 1950-87. 5 video tapes and 10 audio tapes.
This collection consists of 5 VHS tapes and 10 reel-to-reel audio tape masters of dubs of home disc recordings and live performances of regional country music performed by Clyde Dykes, Orland Whitaker, Ruby Whitaker, Bob Crawford, Mary Grindstaff, B.G. Williams and the Rock Spring Ramblers, 1950-87. These recordings were compiled as part of the Center for Appalachian Studies and Services' Bowmantown Project. Donated by Richard Blaustein, Director, CASS.

Bowmantown Project Collection, 1988-89. Addition. 17 audio cassettes; 30 transcriptions and one folder of photographic prints and negatives.
The audio cassettes, transcriptions, prints and negatives focus on regional musicians performing and discussing performance styles of their traditional country music. Donated by Richard Blaustein, Director, CASS.

Jeanne M. Rasmussen Papers and Photographs, 1967-88. 4.5 linear feet.
The collection contains black and white photographic prints, correspondence, newsletters, pamphlets, clippings, personal notes, together with a book manuscript and a scrapbook documenting the activities of Rasmussen, a photojournalist who concentrated on the socio-economic conditions of Appalachian coal miners and their families. Donated by Jeanne Rasmussen, Reston, Virginia.

Thomas G. Burton Collection, 1985-88. Addition. 7 VHS tapes.
This addition contains seven VHS tapes which describe the homecomings for serpent-handling churches in Greeneville, Tenn., Jolo, W. Va., and Baxter, Ken. Also included is an interview with Dewey Chaffin on serpent handling in Appalachia, 1985-88. Donated by Thomas Burton, who received the tapes from Fred Brown, Knoxville, Tenn.

Washington County, Tennessee Historic Structures Survey, 1983-86. Addition. 3 linear feet.
Contains historical and architectural inventory forms used by the history department, ETSU, in its work on the Washington County structures survey. The project compiled a comprehensive inventory of buildings constructed in Washington County prior to 1931. Donated by Dale Royalty, History Department, ETSU.

Mary Barnicle-Tillman Cadle Collection, 1935-50. Addition. Approximately 550 acetate discs.
The discs document the collecting activities of Mary Barnicle and Tillman Cadle, 1935-50. The field recordings were made in Tennessee, Georgia, Florida, Kentucky, New York and the Bahamas. Donated by Tillman Cadle, Townsend, Tenn.

Richard Blaustein Collection, 1980, 1989. Addition. 15 audio tapes; 3 video tapes.
Consists of 15 reel to reel audio tapes of the Old Time County Radio Reunion, May 16-18, 1980, and 3 video tapes on the August 19, 1989 Country Radio Reunion. The tapes document musical and story-telling activities of regional artists. Donated by Richard Blaustein, Director, CASS.

Norma Thomas, head of the archives, participated in the Sherrod Library on-site visit to Middle Tennessee State University, January 12, 1990. Certain individuals from the library are visiting selected campuses to examine their library's integrated online library systems.

Marie Tedesco, archivist, is on the planning and advisory committee for a project entitled "Change in Johnson City." The project is sponsored by The Road Company, a Johnson City theater group, and funded, in part, by the Tennessee Humanities Council. The project aims to facilitate public dialogue on the nature and effects of change in Johnson City. A series of four to six public forums and a Road Company play will result from this project.

Scott Schwartz, technical services archivist, directs ETSU's "Collegium Musicum," a music ensemble which performs late Renaissance and early Baroque music. The music department and the School of Continuing Studies co-sponsor the collegium. The group will perform an April concert which will feature Italian and English madrigals and dances.

MISCELLANEOUS DONATIONS

The archives extends special thanks to David N. Mielke for his donations of books relating to Appalachian history, culture and literature.

The archives thanks the following donors for a variety items relating to Appalachian history and culture:

Archer Blevins	Virginia Runge
Linda Lowe	Pollyanna Creekmore
McBerney Burleson	Richard Blaustein
Murray Scher	Ed Speer

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